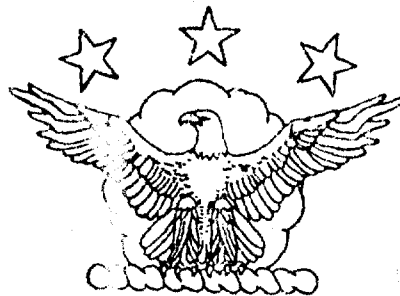


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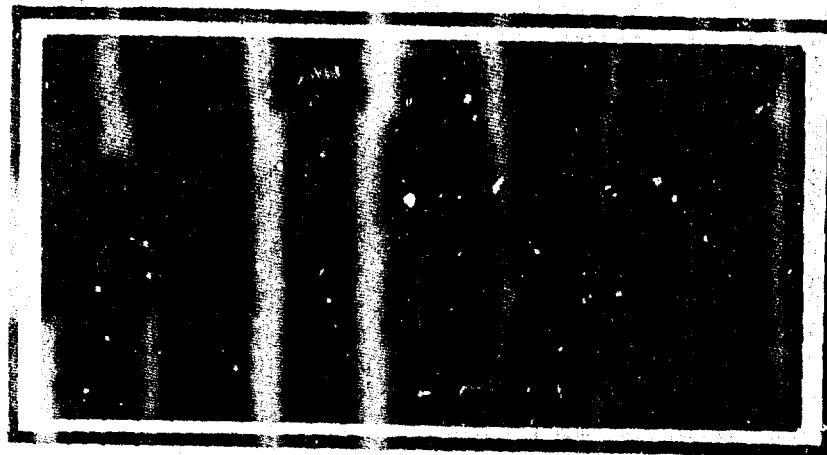
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**AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN KOREAN CULTURE
AND ELECTRONIC MAIL SYSTEMS**

THESIS

**Kenneth W. Thresher
Captain, USAF**

AFIT/GIR/LSQ/89D-11

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**AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN KOREAN CULTURE
AND ELECTRONIC MAIL SYSTEMS**

THESIS

**Presented to the Faculty of the School of Systems and Logistics
of the Air Force Institute of Technology**

Air University

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Information Resource Management

Kenneth W. Thresher, B.S.

Captain, USAF

December 1989

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Ken Thresher

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Abstract

→ The purpose of this study was to conduct a review of the literature in order to identify and examine the specific factors of the Korean culture that could have an influence on the implementation and use of an electronic mail system. The study had several basic objectives: (1) Identify the positive and negative aspects of any electronic mail system. (2) Identify the factors of Korean culture that could have an effect on any electronic mail system. (3) Analyze each of the cultural factors and the problems that could result. (4) Provide possible solutions to any problems that could be encountered.

→ This study found that some cultural factors could have an effect on the implementation and use of an electronic mail system. These factors include typewriter keyboard allergy, maintaining harmony, and proper interpersonal relationships. In addition, customs, values, and religious influences have some effect, but are more influential in supporting other aspects.

➤ An analysis of the problems encountered with cultural factors influencing electronic mail systems revealed that possible solutions negate many of the advantages and productivity gains of electronic mail. This study recommends considering the potential drawbacks with implementing any electronic mail system within the context of Korean culture before making any decision for implementation.

Korea

Research Topic

AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN KOREAN CULTURE
AND ELECTRONIC MAIL SYSTEMS

I. Introduction

Overview

It is increasingly popular for United States military bases to introduce more office automation into base organizations to increase the productivity and enhance the level of communication of the workforce. Electronic mail systems are typically a viable and inherent part of the office automation plans of organizations base-wide. Current United States military assignment tour lengths in Korea are of such short duration that bases in Korea will have to rely more and more on the local national population as the core source for much of the workforce. Additionally, increased host nation support and use of low-wage personnel provide for decreased personnel costs in maintaining American forces overseas. Local Korean national employees at bases in South Korea have become

critical resources that are part of the workforce in these base organizations.

Background

There is a possibility that some cultural values and beliefs of the local Korean national employees may make electronic mail an operation that is uniquely different from that used conventionally by United States government personnel. By overlooking such considerations, the potential success of electronic mail systems on overseas bases could be affected.

Problem Statement

The basic problem then is to determine what aspects of Korean life can influence the successful implementation and use of an electronic mail system when Korean national employees are involved in its use.

Research Objectives

The objective of this research is to discover if there are any special considerations that should be included in any implementation or operation of electronic mail to improve the

effectiveness of its utilization when it involves Korean local national employees.

Research Questions. Specific questions that need to be investigated in this research are:

1. Are there specific aspects of Korean culture which can conflict with the introduction of electronic mail in an automated office system in the workplace?
2. Are there specific aspects of Korean culture which exist that can enhance the use or improve the effectiveness of electronic mail?
3. If conflicts exist, what provisions can be made to insure successful electronic mail implementation in the workplace?

Scope

Research will be limited to current literature on one functional aspect of the office automation system, electronic mail. The cultural experience of the Korean labor force will be taken into account to consider how it could affect acceptable ways to manage and use electronic mail systems. This study will be limited also by

the lack of any survey data from any Korean nationals, whether in the government workforce, or not.

Methodology

The methodology was entirely non-quantitative. The research consisted of a two-part literature review. Part one of the literature review involved collection of information about electronic mail systems, focusing on its characteristics both positive and negative. Part two of the literature review provided a compilation of information on cultural aspects of the Korean people, keying on those aspects that could affect behavior the most. A synthesis of the two parts of the literature review was accomplished by analyzing each aspect of the Korean cultural and how it could affect the different characteristics of any electronic mail system.

II. Review of the Literature

Overview

This chapter consists of two main sections. The first section will cover a review of the literature on one aspect of office automation, electronic mail. The second section will include a discussion on Korean culture. The objective of the literature review is to give the reader an understanding of selected characteristics of an electronic mail system that could be affected by specific aspects of Korean culture.

Electronic Mail

Office automation systems have become increasingly popular in the business world today. Applications of such systems include word processing, communications between members of the organization via electronic mail, spread sheet analysis, graphics, and facsimile generation for presentations, reports, and contracts (20:19). Electronic mail is the one aspect of office automation systems that will be presented within the context of this chapter.

Definition and Description. An electronic mail system uses computer text-processing and communication tools to provide a high

speed information exchange service. It allows a sender to enter a message, and then stores the message until the receiver or multiple receivers are ready to accept it. The receiver can generally answer, forward, file, or delete the communication. Anyone with a computer account can create and send information to anyone who has a "mailbox" account. Technically, electronic mail can be sent point to point between any two computer stations. The most generally accepted concept of electronic mail systems is that they are connected through a computer network. The networked computers are usually physically near each other and connected in what is known as a local area network (LAN). However, the computers can be connected without the use of a LAN. In this case, the computers could be in different locations, to even include other countries, with the connection made via long distance telecommunication links. Electronic mail also can be sent and received through a third party, who receives the message from the sender and then forwards it to the recipient. Usually, the system requires at least a mainframe computer which provides software to take care of housekeeping

such as password protection, temporary storage, and message routing (19:1493; 4:13; 7:91; 22:98; 9; 15).

Primary Purpose. The primary purpose of an electronic mail system is for information sharing. Electronic mail can encourage sharing of information because of its speed and capability to contact many users in one message. Because the importance of physical proximity is reduced, one can obtain more viewpoints on an issue or find the expertise to solve a problem. As opposed to using a slower process with a written letter or using a staff meeting format whereby everyone may not be able to attend, management executives can use electronic mail to spread news and solicit opinions from employees at all levels and all locations of the organization (13:84; 6:30).

Characteristics. The characteristics of an electronic mail system can be separated into both positive and negative aspects. A detailed discussion ensues beginning with the positive aspects, followed by the negative aspects. In addition, a secondary effect, that of social networks, will finalize the discussion on electronic mail characteristics.

Positive Aspects of Electronic Mail.

Rapid Transmission. When compared to other written forms of communication, the chief advantage of an electronic mail system is its rapid message transmission, allowing for instant receipt of the sender's message and instant response (15:73).

Multiple Recipients. Another positive characteristic of electronic mail is that it can be sent to many people just as easily as to one person. The message can be transmitted in the form of a mailing list (13:84; 15:73).

Anonymity. There is a positive side to the fact that electronic mail is in a written format. Because of its perceived transitory nature, electronic mail can present a perceived sense of anonymity. According to psychologist Sara Kiesler at Carnegie-Mellon University, electronic mail can loosen up communication and information-sharing within the corporation. She found that because electronic mail messages lack visual cues about the sender's professional stature or demeanor, people tend to concentrate on the message content and not the sender's social

context. As a result, electronic mail users react to proposals and ideas more bluntly and honestly than they do in more personal situations (6:30).

Certified Mail. Some electronic mail systems possess capabilities and services which can provide for audit trails that verifies to the sender when the transmission of the message has been completed. The sender receives confirmation when the recipient has read the message (5:33; 2:16; 17:46). This audit trail feature provides electronic mail users with an additional capability that compares directly with the certified mail service provided by postage mail.

Asynchronous Nature. Electronic mail has an asynchronous nature to it. That is, the sender and receiver do not have to be on the system network simultaneously for the message to be transmitted. The advantage of this is that it can reduce "memo wars" in the organization. A "memo war," sometimes referred to as "telephone tag," is the process of attempting to contact someone by telephone and not being able to reach the intended recipient. The sender leaves a memo with the person taking the call. When the

recipient returns the call, this person encounters the same problem. Thus, the memos continue to pass back and forth without direct contact. Instead of leaving memos with an intermediary each time two persons attempt to communicate with each other over the telephone, electronic mail can be used to send the message directly to the intended recipient, without an intermediary being relied upon to record the receipt of the phone call (13:82-83).

Availability. Since a user must possess a mailbox account, it also makes them available for receiving messages. Thus, the advantage is that any user can be linked to the rest of the organization for electronic mail communications.

Written Form. Because electronic mail is presented in written format, it can easily be saved as a permanent record. This can be accomplished by either by printing the message or by saving it into computer's memory file. These options are available for both the sender and the recipient of any message.

Negative Aspects of Electronic Mail.

Rapid Transmission. In normal written correspondence, the time it takes to type up a document or the

review process prior to dispatch can prevent embarrassing mistakes. If any second thoughts came later, there could always be the opportunity when one could attempt to retrieve memos from in-boxes before they were read, or outgoing mail before it is sent. With electronic mail there's no temporary buffer that would allow for changing one's mind. Once transmitted, it is not retrievable (6:30).

Multiple Recipients. This broadcast aspect of sending information by using mailing lists can be can have a negative effect. One could be inundated with electronic mail messages from a variety of sources, so some priority filtering method may be needed to ensure that employees use the electronic mail system effectively. Additionally, information sent to many individuals at one time lends itself to being misunderstood as to applicability. That is, messages broadcast by a mailing list may not apply to all recipients, especially when the sender transmits using a standardized list for convenience sake. The role of each recipient would then be to determine how and to what extent the message applies to them.

Anonymity. On the negative side of the perceived transitory nature, electronic mail can present a perceived sense of anonymity that encourages users to let it all hang out at the keyboard. This perceived sense of anonymity is considered a false feeling, since in reality, the recipient can trace the origin of any message by the address header. The most extreme cases of unrestrained electronic communication, called "flaming," occur when electronic mail users write and transmit messages in the heat of the moment (6:30).

Certified Mail. The negative side of the certified mail feature is that the receiver is held accountable for receipt of the message and any action that is required because of the content of the message. The sender is also accountable for content of the message sent.

Asynchronous Nature. Electronic mail has an asynchronous nature to it. That is, the sender and receiver do not have to be on the system network simultaneously for the message to be transmitted. This means that the receiver does not usually know when a mail message arrives. Time sensitive messages can,

therefore, be left in the "mailbox" account beyond the time frame needed to act upon it. Thus, the negative aspect is that the "mailbox" account must be checked regularly and requires a disciplined effort to check it at regular intervals (7:91).

Availability. The negative side of possessing a mailbox account is that it creates the possibility of being the recipient of electronic mail abuse. Unsolicited "junk" electronic mail can easily find its way into electronic mailboxes (6:30). With postage mail, junk mail can be easier to sort out, partly due to learned responses from past experiences, but also because it often can be visually recognized at a glance. With electronic mail, one may have to read all or most of a message to understand its value as to whether it is junk or not.

Written Form. There is also a negative side to this written form of communication. Just as with any form of written communication, the nonverbal aspect of electronic mail by sending text instead of a voice message allows for a lack of emphasis and intonation. The sender and the receiver can not provide or interpret additional nonverbal cues that could create a more

complete picture of the intended message. Also, in face-to-face communication, the receiver can interrupt the conversation and ask for additional clarification before becoming more confused. Thus, interpretation of the intent of any electronic mail message can be affected by its written form. This is considered a problem only if electronic mail is used to replace some form of verbal communication.

Secondary Effect of Electronic Mail.

Social Networks. A secondary effect of the electronic mail system is that it can also create "electronic water coolers." That is, social networks can be formed where groups of people may socialize on an enjoyment basis. In addition to this, information may be exchanged, and frequently good work-related ideas can be generated within such exchanges. As compared to the process of exchanging verbal information by gathering around the office water cooler, employees have been found to send personal messages, arrange lunch dates and even romance each other on electronic mail. Membership within such groups can be quite

closed, and interaction may be loosely coupled, that is, without a formal organizational link in the worker relationship (13:421; 6:30).

Korean Culture

This section of the chapter is intended to provide an understanding of the Korean people and their culture. First, some background information is provided. Next, the factors of Korean culture that could have an influence on the way electronic mail systems may be utilized or managed will be presented. These factors will be presented in order of perceived influence, but first a background discussion of the Korean people.

Background. Korea is a fast-changing nation of the Far East located on a peninsula that juts south from northern Asia (11:7). The Korean people have a history that reaches back some five thousand or more years. The Koreans originated as a northern, continental people, not related to the south Chinese nor the Polynesian peoples of Southeast Asia. Their language is an Altaic tongue closely related to Turkic, Hungarian and Finnish rather than to other Asian languages. With their unique language and customs,

the Koreans have created their own distinctive culture, which they still preserve and guard, at least to some extent, to this day (11:40).

Religions. The Koreans have borrowed and adapted a great deal of their early religion from neighboring China. Among these Korean religious and philosophical adaptations were Buddhism, Shamanism, and Confucianism (11:40). Christianity was adopted from the influence of Western missionaries and presently represents about 16% of the Korean population (1:3). With the exception of Christianity, the various religions of Korea tend, for the most part, to complement rather than contradict one another (12:99).

Buddhism. Buddhism has the largest group of Korean followers (12:100). A religion of Indian origin, it is one of both fatalism and compassion, which have remained as prominent Korean traits (11:41). Korean Buddhism emphasizes attainment of eternity, or Nirvana, through faith. Believers are expected to live and improve themselves through standards of righteous life, but are not expected to attain eternal life or enlightenment within their lifetimes. Salvation emphasizes withdrawal rather than social

action. However, Korean Buddhism does have a social consciousness that is dominated by love and charity toward all persons (12:100; 18:196).

Shamanism. Combining with these strains of thought has been the influence of the Siberian shamanism or reverence for spirits, and for nature. Shamanism recognizes a variety of spirits who can work for good or evil. These spirits must be appeased to avoid evil, cast out if need be, and solicited to ensure success and fortune. Many ancient Korean customs have to do with winning the spirits' favor or averting their wrath. The ecstatic nature and supernatural element of shamanism represent the deeply emotional and instinctual drives of the Korean people (11:41; 12:100).

Confucianism. Confucianism, which originated in China, is more a philosophy or a systems of ethics than a religion (11:41; 12:100). Confucianism holds that man is considered basically good, but can be changed by bad influences of the social environment in which he interacts. Thus, man can become evil. Because of this potential for evil influences, Confucianism

emphasizes the importance of doing things in the right way. Family plays a central role in social life, with an accent on the proper behavior within families and interpersonal relationships with others. This ceremonious politeness and respect for family and elders is characteristic of northeast Asian cultures, has become strongly rooted in Korea, and continues to deeply influence the Korean behavior to this day (11:41; 12:101; 18:200).

Relationships. The traditional Korean family consciousness is depicted as "filial piety," which attributes the most importance to the father-son relationship. Filial piety consists of devotion of children to their parents, but not of that of parents toward their children (18:335). Not only are Koreans educated along this principle in their family life, but for that of all other human relations as well. It concerns not only a person's parents and home, but one's attitude toward others and one's conduct in society. It also applies to how faithfully a person performs one's official duty, to how warmly one treats friends, and how prudent one behaves (18:335). Five categories of interpersonal relations form the basis for instruction as to the duties and obligations involved. These five

consist of those relations between not only parent and child, but king and minister, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and friend with friend (14:38). Filial piety has become an absolute norm and value for Koreans. They are taught to practice it constantly, even to the point of sacrificing their lives to uphold it (18:335).

The dutiful son remains implicitly obedient to his father throughout his life (14:38-39). The father and son relationship has an ambivalent quality about it. Although considered the most important relationship because it maintains the link to the clan, it is not one of open and demonstrated affection. Custom dictates that a father be restrained in his attitude toward his son, often appearing coldly distant, no matter what his real feelings may be. The father also represents the family disciplinarian and tends to be a strict. The son must show absolute respect, regardless of how he actually feels (14:48).

Linked to these relationships is the custom of greeting elders. When two Koreans meet each other, the younger one greets the elder first. In greeting, the younger goes up to the elder to do so.

When an inferior greets his superior in a room, he makes an obeisance by kneeling and bending at the waist, stands up again, and remains standing until told to sit down. This mode of greeting today is reserved for special occasions, but some conservative families retain this custom on a daily routine. When outdoors, one just bows (18:342).

Education. Education, in part, has changed much of the traditional Korean life-style. English is considered to be the most important foreign language and is compulsory in middle school. The liberation from Japanese rule in 1945 was a turning point for Korean education. Shifting from a totalitarian approach to a democratic one, the prime concern of educators was the universalization of education for the masses (21:29; 3:95; 18:673).

The 1970s was a period of decisive systematic innovations for national modernization. The New Community Movement was promulgated under a government initiative. Advocating the internalization of such virtues as self-help, diligence, and cooperation, the Movement spread across Korea, gradually developing into a system for improving living standards. Education

found its role in helping people internalize these virtues, thus building the spiritual backbone of the people. Notably, this movement has strengthened the social function of school education (18:673).

With these changes, secondary education has developed a new image of providing young people with basic learning skills that provide a strong foundation for adapting in today's changing world. With rapid technological advancements, the need for technical or skill education has become even more important. Reforms at all levels are continually taking place to promote and popularize this type of education (18:676).

Modernization. Korea is embodied in modernization within the context of an ancient people with a long history and strong sense of tradition. Koreans are proud of their past, and resolute against rejecting it in the process of modernization. At the same time, they realize that growth means change, and that it is a difficult task to decide what to save, what to reject, and what to adapt. They love their land; they respect its traditions. They are determined to cling to the core of their values and their cultures, no

matter what changes, small or great, may take place in the process of modernization. And those changes have been great, and are continuing, for especially in a land poor in natural resources, such as Korea, modernization means industrialization and competing in world export markets (11:7).

Koreans needed the toughness and spirit of their ancestors to survive on a peninsula that throughout history has remained a focus of regional rivalries between powers bigger and stronger than Korea. The Koreans are known as a peaceful and extroverted, loyal, and stubborn to a fault, family-centered, and very hospitable (11:41).

Cultural Factors. The discussion in the remaining subsections of this chapter focuses on those cultural factors that may influence the use of an electronic mail system. These factors are presented in order of perceived influence.

Keyboard Illiteracy. The Koreans and the Japanese borrowed the Chinese writing system and many Chinese words; about half the words in a standard Korean dictionary are of Chinese derivation (12:9). The use of syllabic groups makes it easy to

combine the phonetic script with Chinese characters. Literate Koreans in the south still use Chinese characters for words derived from Chinese (which make up about half the listings in Korean dictionaries), and the schools teach a standard list of 1,900 such characters (12:282).

Schlesinger writes that in Japan, the Japanese alphabet is so huge, Japan has no history of typewriter use and this means that cases of "keyboard allergy" among older workers is a common occurrence (16:A8). Because of a similar alphabet problem with the Korean language, one could surmise that this is also true of the Korean people.

Maintaining Harmony and Kibun. Harmony in personal relationships is a dominating force in Korean life. Koreans will usually go to any extreme in avoiding conflicts and will make a concerted effort in keeping from appearing rude or even impolite. Friendships are considered very valuable and close. One is expected to solve a friend's difficulties even if it appears unreasonable or impossible. In fact, it is considered an insult to refuse such a friend's request. It is even more unforgivable to fail a superior (21:24).

Related to this desire to maintain harmony is what the Koreans call "kibun." Michael Wickman explains kibun in this way:

In Korea, it is of unparalleled importance to maintain a high *kibun*, meaning the mood or feeling of a comfortable state of mind. The breakage of machinery, the production line error or bad news from head office, are not considered nearly so serious, in themselves, as the reporting of it, which will occasion loss of face for the teller and damaged kibun for the hearer. Bad news is never given in the first hour of the business day. If a report is inescapable, the evening is a better time for it, when there is at least a night in which to restore kibun. (21:24-25)

Interpersonal Relationships. As indicated, filial piety attributes the most importance to the father-son relationship (18:335). Because Koreans are taught this principle in their family life and all other human relations as well, it applies to one's superiors in the work environment. Most interpersonal relationships are based on superior-subordinate relations. The superior is considered in a position of power and the subordinate must maintain a proper attitude of respect and politeness. This approach demands a mutual attitude of benevolence, restraint, understanding, and faith (14:38-39).

Preventing Loss of Face. The Korean gentleman is taught not to show his emotions. Even though he may be in a joyous

mood, he does not shout, laugh loudly, clap his hands, or jump up and down. He just smiles gently or holds the hand of the other softly. Instead of showing anger, he merely stares at the other.

When he commits an unintentional error or blunder, he smiles in the way of asking for forgiveness. Such a smile is to be construed as a silent apology, not an act of callousness. Also, the one who brings bad news may smile very warmly in an attempt to soften the blow. One may avoid presenting bad news even if one is merely the messenger and is not responsible for it. Loss of face is being embarrassed, humiliated, or shamed. If it occurs in front of others, one's face may be unrecoverable (18:342; 21:24).

Patience and Persistence. The qualities that have enabled the Korean people to survive as a border people have become their most strongly ingrained attributes. Hoefer and others indicate that these are primarily patience, flexibility, and stubbornness. They also say that there may be added a satiric and often uncouth sense of humor as part of these qualities. Korean patience does not mean passivity, and flexibility does not imply a

lack of strong individuality. Stubbornness is sometimes referred to as perseverance, which may help to explain the other two qualities (8:64).

Informal Social Gatherings. The rural community was the center of social activity for most Koreans for thousands of years (12:74). Village affairs, including maintenance of social order and propriety, were traditionally governed by an informal council of elders from the constituent families (12:74). Industrialization and urbanization began to affect Korean community life in a significant way only in the twentieth century. The Japanese occupation, World War II, the division of Korea into North and South, and the Korean War all combined with the industrialization process to uproot traditional agrarian communities. Yet traditions persist to a considerable extent in the shrinking agricultural population and even in the urban consciousness. The continuing strength of family and community bonds was demonstrated by the capacity of refugees during and after the Korean War to move as groups to places of safety and to look out for one another's welfare (12:74).

Other interpersonal relations have a more casual significance despite the formal procedures sometimes involved. Individuals do

not talk about serious things to each other very much, or at least to those outside of the family. Social exchanges between a number of people of the same sex is more common than interpersonal meetings of just two people. Within the village, if one man visits, others will gather, with the result being that privacy becomes difficult to arrange (14:52-53).

Differing Generations. While the new and reformed education process is one of the keys to understanding Korea today, there is a great difference between Koreans educated under the Japanese system, and those educated under the post-Liberation system. There will be even more differences among the elementary school children, secondary school pupils, and college students when these reach maturity. In general, the Japanese-educated above the age of forty are less progressive than the younger generations who received their education after the Liberation, and the gap increased even more by the division of the country and the Korean War. The older generation does not understand the younger ones. Because of traditional ingrained values and ethics, they are prone to put the younger Koreans under an authoritarian system in the school, and is

not well accepted by the younger generation. This demonstrates not only a source of conflict, but a difference between the old and the young (10:364). The older generation holds positions of extreme power and authority in both society and business.

III. Analysis and Discussion

Overview

The objective of this chapter is to provide an understanding of how those specific aspects of Korean life and culture that were discussed in Chapter II could have an effect on characteristics of an electronic mail system. Each aspect of Korean life and culture will be discussed individually with a view as to how behavioral characteristics of the cultural aspect could effect selected aspects of an electronic mail system.

People

According to Cheng:

Although automated office systems have the potential for increasing office productivity, people remain the most crucial part of any office system. As a result, management must make all efforts to ensure that the implemented automated system will be accepted and used effectively by office personnel in order to achieve the desired productivity gains. (4:15)

In order to understand how electronic mail will be accepted and used among the Koreans, one needs to be aware of those aspects of the Korean culture that may enhance as well as those that may detrimentally effect its use.

Effects of Korean Culture on Electronic Mail

First, a summary of the aspects of electronic mail that may be effected by Korean culture is presented in Figure 1 below:

Positive aspects of electronic mail

1. Rapid transmission - send messages immediately
2. Multiple recipients - by use of mailing lists
3. Anonymity - allows for reduced inhibitions
4. Certified mail - documents receipt of messages
5. Asynchronous nature - receiver always available
6. Availability - links users to the organization
7. Written form - provides for a permanent record

Negative aspects of electronic mail

1. Rapid transmission - limits time for reflection or second thoughts
2. Multiple recipients - priority filtering needed by recipient
3. Anonymity - no constraints on message content
4. Certified mail - receiver accountability for receipt of message; sender accountability for content
5. Asynchronous nature - requires action on part of receiver to complete the communication
6. Availability - allows for junk mail, personal communications
7. Written form - absence of nonverbal cues

Secondary effects of electronic mail

1. Social networks - "electronic" water coolers

Figure 1. Aspects of Electronic Mail.

Next, a summary of the aspects of the Korean cultural factors that may have an effect on electronic mail is presented in Figure 2:

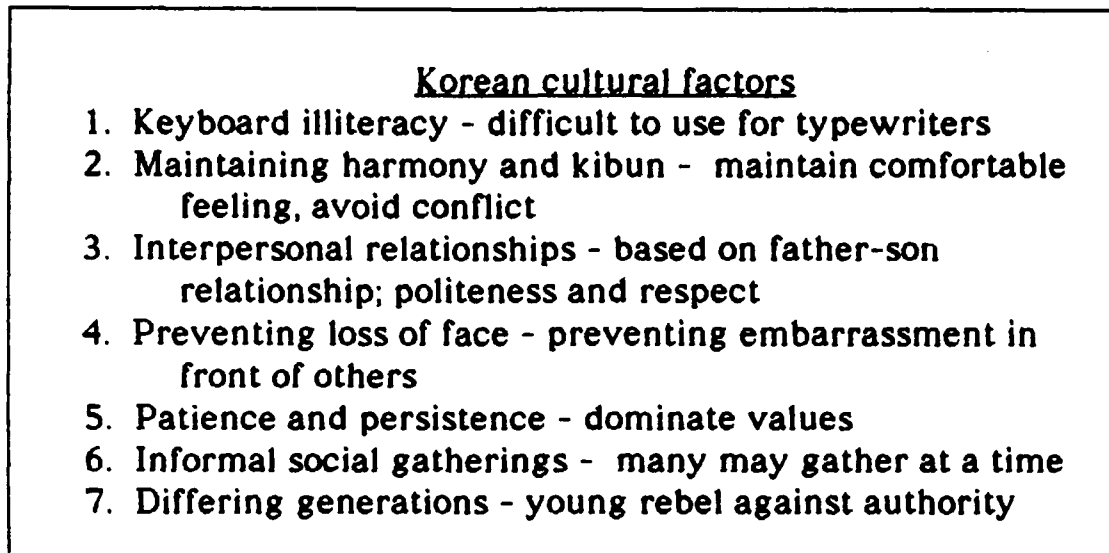


Figure 2. Aspects of Korean Culture.

A discussion and breakdown of individual aspects of Korean culture and an analysis of how they may effect the use of electronic mail are presented in the next subsections. In addition, possible solutions are provided in areas where cultural factors may present problems.

Keyboard Illiteracy. Probably the most important cultural factor that can directly affect behavior is caused the nature of the Korean language. In essence, the Korean language is too complex and has too many characters to lend itself to the use of typewriters.

Therefore, Koreans have not become familiar with keyboard operations required for the use and proficiency on any computer-based electronic mail system. Additionally, the people in the Far East, such as the Japanese and presumably more so the Koreans, have not had the experience and use of integrated office automation to the extent of those workers in the United States and Europe. Research indicates that countries in the Far East make less efficient use of microcomputers than do Americans and Europeans. That is, most microcomputers are limited to one function and cannot communicate with other terminals. The trend is still to use machines dedicated to word processing only, without any communication capability (16:1).

To counteract this problem, it would be vital for the organization to provide training to all users and potential users of electronic mail systems. Not only are typing skills needed to use the system, but additional training is necessary to learn the functional aspects needed to access the system itself, log on, log off, transmit, file maintenance, and other functions needed to effectively utilize electronic mail. Besides providing the necessary skills to use the

system, points of contact should be established to provide assistance on a daily basis for any problems that may be encountered. In short, the organization must provide the means to facilitate and encourage the use of the electronic mail system as well as the necessary familiarization and training. Alternatively and though not ideally, administrative support personnel could be provided to those who lack the necessary skills, but need to use the system.

Maintaining Harmony. Because of the value placed on maintaining a comfortable feeling, and avoiding conflict, harmony and kibun can effect the use of electronic mail. First, by avoiding conflict one would be restrained as to the content of the message by attempting to keep the subject on an even keel. If there is an actual conflict presented by the content of a message sent, then the receiver may downplay the conflict and not provide the necessary input in return to resolve the issue. In this sense, the avoidance of conflict and furtherance of harmony may hinder the communication process. Although this may a problem with any form of communication, the ability to detect it is slowed down without face-to-face contact.

To alleviate this problem, managers at all levels of the organization need to be aware that the resolution of issues that can present conflict may best be dealt with using alternative means other than electronic mail. It would be better to use face-to-face communications when possible in these situations; however, the productivity gains with the use of electronic mail would be negated. This can be accomplished in a one-to-one confrontation or in a group meeting. The issue itself and who it would affect would dictate which choice to use.

Electronic mail also is a problem when Koreans would want to present bad news at the end of the day and have the evening in which to restore kibun. No matter which time is selected to send the message, one would not know when the recipient would read it. This would be further complicated if it is sent to more than one individual at the same time.

The best solution to this problem would be to use some alternative voice communication, either over the telephone or in person. Either of these two would negate the advantage of using electronic mail.

With their desire to avoid conflict, Koreans will not be apt to partake of such things as "flaming." That is, they would not feel that sense of anonymity, but feel more restrained in the content of any message that would be transmitted. Not only would they feel restrained in this way, but the possibility of sending junk mail and using the system for personal communications would be reduced.

One would expect Koreans to willingly check their "mailbox" account. This means that they would tend to complete the communication process in order to avoid the conflict that could be generated by ignoring the sender's message. Thus, one would expect the negative aspect of being dependent upon the recipient to check the electronic mail account to be counteracted by the drive for maintaining harmony.

Interpersonal Relationships. Because the father-son relationship is construed as the basis for all proper relationships, sending electronic mail messages to superiors can be a problem for Korean workers. With the readily available use of mailing lists, this means one would likely be in the situation to send messages to superiors, as well as subordinates and colleagues. In order to

include the proper presentation, one would be required to separate names of the superiors on the list from the others. This would require additional time and effort to customize such lists, at least initially. If the list will be used for a one-time purpose, then customized lists would have to be created each time. More importantly, the content of the message would have to be customized. In order to maintain proper relationships, Koreans would not be expected to write the same message in the same way to superiors, as they would to others. Therefore, the content of a message being sent to a superior would differ from that being sent to subordinates or colleagues. The result of the extra time and effort in having to customize the content of the message and the mailing lists means that productivity would be reduced.

A possible solution to this problem of sending messages via mailing lists would be for the organization to develop customized mailing lists for individuals. Additionally, part of the training program would be to teach users to initiate an electronic mail message by typing it into a file within the word processing memory first. Then, the core content of the message could be duplicated for

each mailing list. Once duplicated, additional information could be provided or the original message could be changed to provide a customized message to match the intended message content for the mailing list recipients. Once this is set up, the process would entail using the mailing list for the "TO" block, then using the "send text" function for each message version that was developed for that particular mailing list. The process of duplicating the core message could save time and work by avoiding the tedious process of typing each message separately. Of course, to some extent this solution will require extra work, but not to the extent that would occur if one had to type a separate copy for each addressee.

Another negative effect would be that one would be reticent in utilizing the certified mail feature of communications if the message involves being sent to superiors. Fearing improper behavior towards a superior in this aspect could inhibit its full use and thereby impair its effectiveness. However, from the recipient side, one would not expect to encounter problems with its use. Receiving a message from a superior or anyone else with the

certified mail feature would be thought of as a matter of course, without any negative effect.

For Korean users, the receiver of a message may feel obligated to be polite and provide a reply. Therefore, the certified mail feature may not even be necessary when communicating with the Korean nationals workforce. The politeness and respect shown could interfere with a frank, straight-forward answer that may be sought by the original sender. Without the nonverbal cues associated with face-to-face communications and the ability to immediately see if the sender is being frank, it could be difficult to discern if the reply is merely perfunctory or not.

In these instances, it would be best to solve this problem by ensuring the organization attempts to resolve issues needing frank answers by some other means, such as open forums where everyone gathers at a meeting. With the face-to-face group environment, nonverbal cues could assist in the process that may elicit a resolution of the issue more easily. However, such a process may require more time and effort from members of the organization, and

would therefore be counter-productive to the gains sought by an electronic mail system.

Preventing Loss of Face. When attempting to save face in front of others, either with presenting bad news or because of an embarrassing situation, a smile is used to construe asking for forgiveness or to soften the blow. With electronic mail one can not show a smile, so the recipient would not know the sender is asking for forgiveness.

A possible solution would be to use a mechanism to indicate the cultural smile normally intended. A sideways happy face is presented by using, ":)." Of course, those using such symbols would have to understand what they mean. To the uninformed, one would think a colon and a close parenthesis together could be thought of as a typographical error. Any symbol would not only have to be understood, but would have to be accepted within the context of the Korean culture.

Another problem generated with electronic mail and preventing loss of face is that an embarrassing message could easily be sent to multiple recipients. This would increase the amount of

embarrassment and make it more difficult to save face because one would have to attempt to do so with many more individuals.

The solution to this problem is for users of the electronic mail system to be aware of the impact of sending potentially embarrassing messages, and to send them only to individuals and not to multiple recipients in a broadcast mode with the use of mailing lists. The key in these instances is for one to have the sensitivity to understand when the situation will dictate this action. What is embarrassing for a Korean may not be so for an American.

Patience and Persistence. With values such as patience and persistence the discipline required to check the electronic mail file would be logically evident. Their patience could be detrimental by not making full use of the certified mail feature when it is necessary, and by assuming that they can wait for replies back. In sum, Koreans would be persistent in that they will check their electronic mail regularly and reply to the messages contained in their mailbox account, and that they will be patient with others by not using the certified mail feature. Thus, the certified mail feature would probably not be needed when communicating with Koreans.

Both patience and persistence are positive attributes for the implementation and use of any electronic mail system. Although there could be problems associated with other Korean cultural influences, patience and persistence would have enhance the overall implementation and growth stages of the system. Thus, where some continual problems might frustrate others, Koreans would be work through the growing pains until the problems are resolved.

Informal Social Gatherings. Koreans value informal gatherings and may expect many others to assemble at a given time. If isolated at a work station where the link to the rest of the organization is electronic mail, then social gatherings can not be allowed to take place. As a substitute, the electronic social network could flourish because more individuals could be contacted with electronic mail than would be encountered with social intercourse in a face-to-face environment.

What may be more of a problem would be to not have any social network that would involve the physical presence of others. Workers could be isolated with their only link to the organization being electronic mail. Because of their desire to participate in

informal social gatherings, Koreans could easily feel too isolated and that could result in reduced productivity. Management should ensure that workers are not completely isolated from the rest of the organization and that some degree of social networks with face-to-face contact are available for co-workers.

Differing Generations. The last and probably the least factor affecting electronic mail is the difference of generations. This difference may make it difficult for the younger people who have gone through the education process in defiance of the authoritarian rule of the older generation to cooperate. This would show itself with certified electronic mail in which the recipient would know that upon receiving the message that the sender would be able to recognize it as received. The young Koreans could want to rebel against the fact that they are being watched and checked up on to ensure that they cooperate by acknowledging or replying to the message. This rebelliousness may surface in more subtle ways as young Koreans would be more apt to rebel against the authoritarian structure and less so by being impolite.

This same rebelliousness could manifest itself with the perceived feeling of anonymity in transmitting messages. It would allow for unrestrained content of messages to others, to the point of testing any limits of acceptability. Also, not only the content may be unrestrained to some degree, but this may mean that junk electronic mail and personal communications would take place, again to the point of reaching artificial limitations.

The key to the solution of this problem would be to first establish clear written guidelines for the use of the electronic mail system. Next, those guidelines must be firmly and fairly enforced.

Summary

Trends toward new changes and developments, not only in education, but in business may positively effect electronic mail systems. With modernization has come changes and Korea is changing more toward Westernization than in any other direction. This would tend to lead one to believe that many of the social values and cultural aspects may not be as applicable as industrialization and modernization takes a firmer hold. This is not say that some of these values and customs will not continue in some way. The

education process with all its reforms should continue to make Korea more competitive with the modern world. This can mean Koreans will be taught not only the skills and attitudes necessary for successful implementation of office automation systems in general, but electronic mail specifically.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview

This chapter summarizes the conclusions that can be drawn from this study of the relationships between Korean culture and the aspects of the electronic mail system. Recommended actions are provided for the improved effectiveness of the implementation of the electronic mail system. Finally, recommendations for further research are provided.

Conclusions

To expect all Koreans to behave in specific ways or to possess certain cultural values would too general an assumption. Because of its non-quantitative orientation, this study only begins to provide some insight into Korean cultural factors that might effect electronic mail systems.

It is difficult at best to isolate all the cultural factors that could come into play with the use of any electronic mail system. Korea is a fast-changing nation embracing both new and old values, customs, and ways of life. Because no two persons will react in the same way with any situation, one should not use this study to stereotype any

possible behavioral reactions that are delineated in this study. This study is provided for one to become more familiar with and be aware of some of the possible problems and pitfalls that could be encountered and to consider some proposed solutions. Such an awareness can be a positive tool in the utilization and management of an electronic mail system when Korean nationals are participating.

The most important aspects of Korean culture that can effect successful communications with electronic mail are keyboard allergy caused by the nature of the Korean language, maintaining harmony and kibun, and proper subordinate-superior relationships. Customs, values, and religious influences tend to have some effect by themselves, but are more influential in supporting the other aspects. Figure 2 identifies the cultural aspects that can directly effect behavior in using electronic mail systems. Modernization trends have started to change the cultural values, customs, and social life of Koreans, but it presents problems of the conflict generated with the old versus the new.

The solutions to most problems generated by Korean cultural factors within the context of electronic mail systems impact the productivity gains and advantages normally attained by electronic mail. Because of this reason, implementation of an electronic mail system within the Korean culture may not solve all the problems one might expect. In fact, it may create others as well. One should be cautioned to proceed with lesser expectations if inclined to implement such a system within the Korean workforce.

Recommendations

Assuming an organization may still want to implement an electronic mail system, the following recommendations are offered for consideration in any efforts to improve the effectiveness of the implementation and utilization of electronic mail systems with Korean users.

1. First, top management must be involved at the outset of the electronic mail implementation to create a corporate identification with encouraging the use of the system. This is true for any implementation, but more so for an electronic mail system which may encounter cultural barriers at its very inception.

2. Establish a working group with participating representatives that involves people from all levels of the implementing organization. Look for inputs that would indicate why some aspects of electronic mail are working and why some are not. The working group should meet on a regular basis, but initially at least monthly.

3. Establish training programs where typing and keyboard familiarization are stressed. Without ensuring that potential users know how to use the system, electronic mail will not be utilized.

4. Utilize hardware and software monitors to determine the amount of use of the electronic mail system. Certified mail can be used to see if the recipient receives the intended message, but monitors can indicate how often the electronic mail system is being used. This could pinpoint unwilling users which management can further investigate as to reasons why the nonuse occurs.

5. Continually consider alternative means of communications where the effectiveness of communications are impaired by specific cultural aspects in relation to the electronic mail system.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommend a study be conducted of those workers in the actual work environments in Korea. This study could be accomplished by survey or by the case study method. Being able to interview individuals in their work environment could provide better insights than with a written survey. The same questions should be asked of the American workers in these environments in order to compare their responses with that of the Koreans. It is not only possible that Korean workers could be assimilating cultural values of Americans, but Americans could also be assimilating some of the values of the Koreans whom they come in contact with on a daily basis. It also may be possible to isolate some factors that affect the use of electronic mail as attributable to the unique work environment and not to the cultural differences of the two peoples.

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The purpose of this study was to conduct a review of the literature in order to identify and examine the specific factors of the Korean culture that could have an influence on the implementation and use of an electronic mail system. The study had several basic objectives: (1) Identify the positive and negative aspects of any electronic mail system. (2) Identify the factors of Korean culture that could have an effect on any electronic mail system. (3) Analyze each of the cultural factors and the problems that could result. (4) Provide possible solutions to any problems that could be encountered.

This study found that some cultural factors could have an effect on the implementation and use of an electronic mail system. These factors include typewriter keyboard allergy, maintaining harmony, and proper interpersonal relationships. In addition, customs, values, and religious influences have some effect, but are more influential in supporting other aspects.

An analysis of the problems encountered with cultural factors influencing electronic mail systems revealed that possible solutions negate many of the advantages and productivity gains of electronic mail. This study recommends considering the potential drawbacks with implementing any electronic mail system within the context of Korean culture before making any decision for implementation.

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